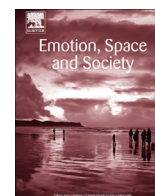


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Touching the Virgin. On the politics of intimacy in Jean-Luc Godard's *Hail Mary*[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This paper is guided by a conviction common to Godard and Merleau-Ponty: namely, that the special power of art is its ability to show up for us the invisible, what was previously unseen, and thereby to shape intimately, to transform, our own perceptions of the world. Art can thereby bring us into a more intimate contact with reality. With reference especially to Godard's film *Hail Mary*, the paper argues that Godard distinguishes between two ways of approaching the human body: on the one hand, it can be approached as prostituted thing – which has the effect of developing in the prostituted person a kind of absence to herself and to others, a dispossession of herself and an anesthesia to her own and others' affective life. On the other hand, the human body can be approached as sacredly human – in which case we will touch that body very differently, expressing our presence to its embodied divinity precisely by withdrawing our touch and leaving space for its own desires. It is proposed that Godard's filmmaking aims at precisely this kind of withdrawal and letting be, and that thereby he awakens his viewers to, makes them more intimate with, the sacred in the human.

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1. Introduction

This text proposes an existential reading of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Hail Mary* (1985).¹ Beginning with a description of the filmmaker's relation to the philosophical thinking of his time, it goes on to describe the way he represents the (female) body in different films of the 1980s. The inquiry into the question of the body in Godard highlights two phenomena opposed to each other according to their existential relevance: prostitution and desire. Prostitution is described by Godard as a state of insensitivity; this can be opposed to Mary's attitude in teaching Joseph to respect and love her own desire. This claim is founded on a close analysis of a key scene in *Hail Mary* where Joseph is allowed to touch Mary, albeit through a peculiar gesture, by removing his hand. Such a gesture is not only significant in the perspective of a discourse on love, but it also has deep political implications. Indeed the use of a figure from the Christian tradition, allows for a renewed understanding of the

political implication of Godard's cinema: Godard develops, through his films, our capacity for perception, in particular our capacity to perceive the power relations between people. The theological dimension of *Hail Mary* stems from the awareness of the failure of perception and thus the need for redemption. The redemption in question is, however, not the familiar Christian notion of redemption, but, as Godard states in his *Historie(s) of cinema*, the “redemption of the real”. Mary, the Virgin, is in this respect a central figure, since she teaches Joseph (and the spectator) to see and touch in a manner that displays faith and confidence in the presence of the world and the readiness to accept the freedom of the other. We thus become witness to the root of a political cinema, from the intimacy of Mary's room to the great catastrophes of the last Century.

2. Godard as an existential philosopher

Godard often claimed, and still does, that his cinema is an activity of thinking. The cinematographic method used to do this thinking is editing (montage), i.e. bringing together images to create conjunctions and disjunctions in order to let the sense of the real appear. Godard's relation to philosophy is perhaps best expressed in this passage from an interview with the film critic Youssef Ishaghpour:

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When I was in high school, concerning existentialism [...], I remember this sentence: 'For existentialism, existence precedes the essence, whereas before, essence preceded existence'; therein, something was understood, something felt, an image arose ... I'd say, the book is essence, films are existence (Godard and Ishaghpour, 2000, 41)²

This philosophical vocation attributed to cinema by Godard echoes the philosophical relevance of cinema as Merleau-Ponty situates it in his lectures at the Collège de France. There, he explains that some non-philosophical practices, including cinema, give rise to philosophical problems more poignantly than academic philosophy itself. Without going into the details of this argument, I simply want to point out that Godard's emphasis on cinema as a means of thinking existence establishes him as one of the most prominent philosophic-artists, among others such as Proust, Cézanne and Klee. The link to Merleau-Ponty is furthermore confirmed by Godard scholars such as Raymond Bellour and Michael Witt. The latter claims that a large part of Godard's work is a reworking of the principle that cinema is about "making visible the links and relations between things and people instead of explaining them" (Witt, 1999, 116–117), a principle drawn directly from Merleau-Ponty's (1945) essay on cinema. In a famous passage from this essay, Merleau-Ponty explains that the appearance of things would be disrupted if we could see as things the interval between things (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, 61). This could involve inverting figure and ground, and thus letting things appear in a new way, on a new ground, or it could amount to making the ground as *such* visible, which would mean letting the invisible be seen. The role of the artist according to Merleau-Ponty is precisely to make images that disrupt our relation to the world in order to enlarge and transform our ordinary perception. Godard very closely follows (or exemplifies) this ideal of the artist's role, as evident both in the way he describes his work in interviews and statements,³ and in the works themselves.

3. The prostituted body

The question of the ontological status of the body has been one of the key problems in phenomenological philosophy throughout the 20th Century, and still today. The body, on the phenomenological account, is taken not only as an organism, but also as the subject itself. This idea of a bodily subjectivity is introduced by Merleau-Ponty, first in the 40s, then more radically in his later writings published under the title *The Visible and the Invisible*. His key argument is that to be visible and to see are two faces of the same reality. In order to be able to see, I have to be visible. As Merleau-Ponty writes: "My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it. There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, 138).⁴

² "Quand j'étais lycéen, à propos de l'existentialisme [...], je me souviens de cette phrase : «Pour l'existentialisme, l'existence précède l'essence tandis qu'avant, l'essence précédait l'existence», voilà, on comprenait quelque chose, on sentait quelque chose, on avait comme ça une image... je dirais que le livre, c'est l'essence, les films c'est l'existence".

³ Cf. for example his statement in the *Scénario de Je vous salue Marie*, a bonus track on the recently published DVD with *Hail Mary*: "I want to make films where one sees what remains usually unseen".

⁴ The French edition reads: "Mon corps comme chose visible est contenu dans le grand spectacle. Mais mon corps voyant sous-tend ce corps visible et tous les visibles avec lui. Il y a insertion réciproque et entrelacs de l'un dans l'autre." (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, 180). This text, *Le visible et l'invisible*, is henceforth referred to as VI, with pagination of the French edition given first, and English translation second.

I would like to argue that visibility and corporeality are among the central questions in Godard's work as well. The rapprochement of Godard with Merleau-Pontian thinking has not only to do with the conception of cinematographic practice, but also the themes treated in his films. One way of exploring the experience of the body in Godard's work is to look at a situation wherein the body is taken as an object: prostitution. Prostitution is a recurring theme in many of Godard's works, in particular in *Le mépris*, *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, and *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*. It is not only a feminine business: Paul Javal in *Le mépris* is also without a doubt a prostitute, although he does not sell his body directly. *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* presents the life of an ordinary young woman, Juliette Jeanson, played by Marina Vlady, living in a brand new Parisian suburb, prostituting herself occasionally in order to earn enough money to buy the dresses she and her friend think pretty. Godard does not show any violent, erotic or pornographic images of those activities; everything goes on apparently very smoothly. Juliette does not express any particular feeling about her situation, no reflectiveness, no joy, but no particular suffering either. This observation leads to a first statement about prostitution in Godard's works: in general, prostitution is presented in connection with an absence of sensitivity, with a peculiar kind of absence to oneself. Just as in *Le mépris*, wherein Paul Javal's selling himself to the producer Jerry Prokosh goes together with his blindness to his wife Camille's situation and feeling, Juliette Jeanson seems strangely absent from her own life.

This has at least two consequences: the first is a link between the capacity to perceive and the relation to one's body. More precisely prostitution bears with it a certain anesthesia both toward one's own affective life as well as toward others'. The latter is a bit more surprising: we are lead to the idea that prostitution entails a limitation of the perceptive capacities in general. In other words, the prostituted body is offered, but not open; it is offered as a closed being. Its capacity for perception is limited by its objectification, a situation which also prevents intimacy, precisely because intimacy requires an attention toward the other's affective life. This apparent paradox in prostitution is the central question I will try to address in the following pages. We will come to understand that the sacred has to do with the capacity of seeing and that this entails a determinate way of relating to bodies. Since Godard affirms on many occasions, in his films, in interviews, etc., the crucial importance of learning to see in order to understand how to act politically, we might conclude that Godard is more interested in this transcendental meaning of prostitution than in its psychological or sociological significance. The term 'transcendental' is used here in the sense of a condition of possibility of perceiving or knowing something. Speaking of a "transcendental meaning" of prostitution amounts to affirm that this activity does influence the perceptual capacities of the subject. In other words, one shouldn't understand his conception of prostitution as a judgment on the activity, but rather as an assertion of a possible manner of being existentially related to one's own and the other's body. For instance, it doesn't mean that intimacy is in principle impossible with a prostitute, but rather that the activity of prostitution is in essence contrary to intimacy.

If we look at another famous Godard film where prostitution is a central motive – *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, translated into English as *Slow Motion* – the characters are in a state of nearly absolute loneliness. The prostitute Isabelle, played by Isabelle Huppert, had to be, according to what Huppert says in an interview given as a bonus track on the recent DVD published by Gaumont, the "face of suffering". That was the only indication Godard gave the young actress in 1979. This seems paradoxical because, in fact, Isabelle has a rather inexpressive face throughout the film. She does not

really express an active suffering. But Godard probably intended this very loneliness that characterizes a prostituted person: it doesn't actually hurt, but one is radically dispossessed from one's body, it is put at the disposal of someone else for a lapse of time and this entails that touching becomes meaningless; one is only supposed to be touched and not really to actively touch oneself. One's subjectivity is thus, so to speak, suspended. Touching a prostitute (as such) is not touching a subject, the subject is necessarily absent. As the film critic and philosopher Pascal Bonitzer notes,

There is no community, no loose, indifferent, familiar communication in this film where the characters, in order to touch one another, must throw themselves harshly against one another. There are only lonelinesses, atoms, monads, who pass each other and sometimes clash in the night (Bonitzer, 1980, 6) ⁵

4. Mary's untouchable body

The opposite of prostitution and loneliness is simply love. Godard says in an interview in 1966, "The only film I really want to make, I'll never make it because it is impossible. It's a film about love, or from love, or with love. To speak in the mouth, to touch the chest, for the women to imagine and to see the body of a man, to caress a shoulder, things as difficult to show and to hear as horror, war and sickness" (Godard 1998a, 294–295).⁶ Raymond Bellour quotes this same statement in order to introduce the film *Hail Mary*. According to him, this film is the closest Godard has come to a film about love. *Hail Mary* is at first glance a postmodern version of the Holy Story of the Announcement and the Birth of Jesus. But I would like to show that the issue is not religion in the ordinary sense, but rather the type of experience triggered by the encounter of unconditional love.

Love is conceived by Godard as a corporeal phenomenon, implying essentially the sense of touch. Indeed, the central moment in *Hail Mary* is when Joseph asks Mary if he can touch her, and she tells him he is not yet ready. The test of love is touch. Joseph asks Mary in their conversation, in the harbor of Geneva, "Since we are getting married, may I look at you when you're naked, once. I'll only look." She answers "Yes, you will look." And when he goes to see her, he takes her by surprise, although she sees him coming (an intriguing temporal contradiction). She has taken her clothes off, and he comes to sit beside her and touches her arm right away. She pushes him away and asks him to tell her he loves her, four times in a row; he says four times "Mary, I love you" and touches her belly each time, but she cannot accept his gesture. At this point the angel Gabriel intervenes and shouts to him "because! because it's the law!"; Joseph gets a second chance: this time he touches her, but says I love you by removing his hand. "Is that 'I love you'?" he asks, and she answers "Yes!"

MP defines the gaze as a touching from afar. If we accept this definition, then the prohibition of touch imposed by Mary upon Joseph raises a problem. What difference does it make that he gets the permission to look but not to touch? Does the sense of touch relate more closely to sexuality and desire than the gaze? Let me propose that the issue is not to separate out vision and touch, but rather to recognize that there are two different ways of touching or seeing, two modes of intimacy: one mode is aiming to possess and

even penetrate the other, whereas the other mode is setting the other free. As Raymond Bellour explains,

Joseph cannot really touch Mary's belly, except by starting already to take away his hand, in order for his desire, his "I love you" be in conformity with the Law. This requires keeping, in relation to the image, to the life from which it emanates, a distance which allows it to exist solely as an image, in its dimension of belief and revelation. One doesn't touch the Virgin's belly if one awaits from Her the aura destined to illuminate any image. (Bellour, 1999, 125) ⁷

There is indeed contact between Joseph's hand and Mary's belly, but the essential phenomenon is not the contact, but rather the movement of removing the hand. Joseph touches Mary's body in a way that not only respects her being, but also testifies to his ability to have confidence, to leave space to her desire. As the psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto says in *L'Évangile au risque de la psychanalyse* [translated as *The Jesus of Psychoanalysis*], the book that inspired Godard's film, "a man is never certain of being the procreator, he must trust the word of his wife" (Dolto, 1977, 26).⁸ In this scene, Godard shows that to love is to leave space for the desire of the other. He quotes another passage from Dolto in the *Scénario de Je vous salue Marie*: Dolto states that "Mary desires. [...] Like any woman, she hopes, she desires to be pregnant of an exceptional being" (Dolto, 1977, 24). But unlike other women, she makes herself available for a process that surpasses her, showing her trust in a word she doesn't understand. In doing so, i.e. in accepting her pregnancy, she displays a joy and an openness to the world quite contrary to the pain and insensitivity of the prostituted. As Mary says herself a little before the scene cited above, "to be chaste is to know all possibilities without losing oneself in them," a sentence actually quoted from Antonin Artaud.⁹ But Godard significantly doesn't quote the following sentence: "to be a virgin is to overlook them without knowing them and to live in spirit above everything," thus taking up Joseph's chastity and Mary's virginity as examples of the same attitude of openness toward the world.

Moving from this reading of the scene between Mary and Joseph as characters in the film to an interpretation of the significance of Mary's body in the perspective of a theory of the filmic image, Bellour argues that Mary's body possesses the status of a very specific kind of image destined to illuminate all images. In this sense, Mary is the ground for any image. As such, Mary herself cannot be the object of an act of touching, but only of an act of removing the hand, just as the showing of her body by the camera must be a way of illuminating the camera rather than an intrusion of the camera into the space of her body. The scene after Joseph's conversion, after he has touched her by removing his hand, is also of great importance to this question: One hears Mary as voice-over, while the images show a beautiful evening sky, a rose bush, a landscape with a field and a train passing, a field of canola flowers, and when the film gets back to Mary's room, with a close-up on Joseph's face expressing a good deal of confusion, she goes on to quote Heidegger: "We're speaking of the Word.

⁷ Joseph ne peut toucher vraiment le ventre de Marie, si ce n'est en commençant déjà à retirer sa main, pour que son désir, son "je t'aime", soit conforme à la Loi. Cela suppose de garder à l'égard de l'image, de la vie dont elle est l'émanation, la distance qui permet de la faire exister en tant qu'image, dans sa dimension de croyance et de révélation. On ne touche pas le ventre de la Vierge si on attend d'elle l'aura destinée à illuminer toute image.

⁸ The relevant text for Godard's film is the chapter on the "Holy Family", pp. 19–31.

⁹ "Être chaste, c'est connaître toutes les possibilités sans s'y perdre. Être vierge, c'est les surplomber sans les connaître et vivre en esprit au-dessus de tout" (Artaud, 1982, 61).

⁵ "Il n'y a en effet aucune communauté, aucune communication diffuse, indifférente, familière, dans ce film où les êtres, pour se toucher, doivent se jeter durement les uns contre les autres. Il n'y a que des solitudes, des atomes, des monades, qui se croisent et parfois s'entrechoquent dans la nuit".

⁶ Quoted also in Bellour (1990, 125).

What we're speaking of, the Word, is always ahead of us." "The Word is always ahead of us," this means in my view that the image or the speech should not illustrate reality. It must be ahead of it, and not directed toward it. The film then turns back to Mary's and Joseph's dialog, while she dances and sits down on the bed next to him and asks "So you won't abandon me?" and he answers while looking through the window toward the light "I will stay, I will never touch you, I'll stay." This echoes Godard's ethics of filmmaking when he insists upon the idea that he doesn't make films *about* something, but *from*, or *out of* something, as he says in a short film from 1984, the *Letter to Freddy Buache*, a film *out of* the city of Lausanne. This point is actually crucial because it expresses Godard's will to establish an intimate relation to the world by refusing the representational regime of the image which only succeeds in putting reality at a distance. Establishing an intimacy with the world implies showing that the body or the landscape are the genuine sources of the image, and not something hidden by the screen.

5. The body as a factory or as a landscape

What kind of being, then, is the body if it is possible to sell it, temporarily or permanently? What kind of being is it, if it is able to illuminate other beings? In a little known film from 1976, *Number Two*, the voice-over asks the viewer, who is supposed to identify with the children, if Daddy (or Mommy) is a landscape or a factory. We might understand the opposition landscape-factory as equivalent to the opposition love-work, which is in the center of another film from the same period, *Passion*, whereby the landscape has to do with the subjective dimension of the body and the motive of the factory has to do with the body as an object that can be sold and bought. Considering that the prostituted body's essential feature is its failure to perceive, and that its function is to be used as a tool (for example for the pleasure or the profit of someone else), we can deduce that in Godard's thinking the body seen as a landscape is closely linked to openness toward the world.

The body is not an organism, not a being in the narrow sense; it is an interval between things, a relation. As the commentator David Sterritt writes, Mary's body is the juncture between the human and the divine: "In this dramatic moment [the scene commented above], bracketed by the sight of Mary's buttocks and the sound of Mary's voice, Godard's equal passion for the lower and upper body signifies a desire he shares with his heroine: to find the divine in the human and the human in the divine" (Sterritt, 1998, 202). The evocation of the divine here is related to the biblical context of the film. When the cinema critic points out that the idea in Godard's film is to build a chiasm between the "lower body" and the "upper body," this cannot but remind one of Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of the body-self as an irreducible *mélange* of mind and matter. The body is both seeing and visible, it sees itself seeing, and touches itself touching, it is a "self through confusion," "caught up in things" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964c, 163). Elsewhere Merleau-Ponty uses the expression "landscape" in the context of describing the body as subject, for example in the last part of *The Visible and the Invisible* — "the visible which is yonder is simultaneously my landscape" (VI, 183/140) — and since my body is a part of the visible that unfolds in front of me, the open faithful body can be conceived as a landscape too. This passage of *The Visible and the Invisible* is quoted by Godard in his later film *JLG/JLG — Un autoportrait de décembre* (1996) in order to speak of the conjunction of the landscapes he sees and his own body as editor (cutting film).¹⁰

The dichotomy of factory-landscape applied to the body implies an opposition between the capacity and incapacity to perceive, between different relations to the world as it appears. The prostituted body is a factory organized in order to produce a certain kind of pleasure, and is normally seen as such by the consumer; in contrast Mary's body is a landscape, as it becomes clear in the sequence following the touching scene with Joseph. The image constantly shifts back and forth from close-ups on Mary's body in her bed to landscapes and fields. The tension rises as Mary gets more and more agitated and the weather gets more and more stormy and rainy, while we hear an inner monologue of Mary's voice leading us through a meditation on her condition in its terrible ambiguity: "There will be no more sexuality in me, I will know the true smile of the soul, not outside, but inside, like a pain that every time will be deserved".¹¹ First we feel a tension, then the storm begins, and Mary gets more and more restless and agitated. We hear her say that "the earth and the sex are in us. Outside, there are only the stars," and those words of appeasement accompany a peaceful evening landscape.¹² The point here is that the analogy established by Godard between the states of Mary, naked and alone in the intimacy of her bed, and the landscapes, both visual and auditory, is needed to express the sensitivity and openness of her body toward the world in its very unpredictability.

6. Learning to see and redeeming the real

What is at stake, metaphysically, in *Hail Mary* is the capacity of perceiving the invisible. The film essentially depicts Joseph's (and Mary's) difficulty believing in what they can't see, i.e. being able to accept a fact imposed on them by the Angel Gabriel. In this sense *Hail Mary* is a variation on and spiritual elaboration of the political injunction Godard gives himself in *Here and Elsewhere*, "We must learn to see!" (*Il faut apprendre à voir*). As the film theorist Vicki Callahan remarks, it would be absurd to construct a binary opposition between the political and the spiritual, especially concerning a work that not only puts it into question, but takes the "spiritual" in a political sense (Callahan, 2004, 188). My proposal here is to see *Hail Mary* within the continuity of Godard's production since the 1970's rather than simply as a meditation on the sacred. The statement "We must learn to see" and the pedagogy of perception implied by it rely on the possibility for cinema to make the invisible appear as such. The invisible in question is not primarily a "spiritual" invisible, but it is the ground of the visible. For a clear political example of this, consider the case of factory workers, where the invisible is the web of power relations in which they are caught, and which they must make visible in order to be able to envision their emancipation. In the case of *Hail Mary*, the invisible refers of course to the divine, but in such a way that it is understood in terms of an interpersonal loving relation. The difficulty of believing in Mary's pregnancy thus stands for the fact that any true relation to the other implies an acceptance of the unpredictable linked to the other's freedom.

The statement "We must learn to see" comes from a recognition that a political film must show not only the situations that motivate a political commitment, but also the conditions of their visibility. This entails a widening of the notion of the political to

¹¹ The French text reads as follows: "Il n'y aura plus de sexualité en moi, je connaîtrai le sourire vrai de l'âme, non à l'extérieur, mais à l'intérieur, comme une douleur qui chaque fois se méritera".

¹² Artaud (1982, 226). These sentences are also quoted from Antonin Artaud's asylum writings, and correspond to a moment in his delirium when the suffering is relenting.

¹⁰ This passage is commented on in Kristensen (2010).

the realm that concerns any kind of power relation and that thematizes the struggle for being heard and respected. A political cinema in that sense is a cinema aimed at showing that which remains unseen in ordinary perception. This means that the cinematographic techniques of showing the intervals between things are essential to political cinema, insofar as the latter aims at teaching people to see other people's landscapes, or at least teaching them to respect the strangeness of other people's landscapes. This is the lesson Godard learned following his trip to the Near East as part of a film project entitled "Victory," about the Palestinian revolution sponsored by the PLO and the Arab League in 1970. Upon his return, he discovered that he did not really hear and see the reality of the Palestinian people he had come to witness, because he had not taken the distance between him and them, between here and elsewhere, into account. In the end, he did not make the film he was supposed to, but instead made *Here and Elsewhere*, four years later, in 1974 – a film which explains why the initial project was impossible.

After that experience, Godard's main reason for making films was (and remains) not only to make things visible, but also to show their conditions of visibility. In Merleau-Ponty terms, we could describe this in terms of the perceptual faith required for the certainty of the presence of the sensible world, a peculiar kind of certainty that "remains absolutely obscure; we can live it, we can neither think it nor formulate it nor set it up in theses" (VI, 27/11). This "unjustifiable certitude of a sensible world common to us ... is the seat of truth within us" (VI, 27/11) writes Merleau-Ponty just after having underlined the obscurity of the presence of the world. This pre-objective obscure presence of the world, also called "wild being," as "foundation of the truth," is in fact the universal ground upon which any perceptible figure, shape, thing, etc. might appear. As such, it is the invisible of the visible, or the untouchable of the tangible, etc. When Merleau-Ponty writes in 1945 that "the aspect of the world would be disrupted for us if we managed to see as things the intervals between things," he is referring to the possibility of a perception of the sensible world as such, of the invisible ground of visibility.¹³

Godard's cinema can and must be considered as a systematic exploration of the visibility of the invisible.¹⁴ It seems that Godard read Merleau-Ponty's (1945) essay quite early and that this text actually continued to inspire him throughout his career, as Michael Witt points out in his 1999 article.¹⁵ His insistence on the motive of the interval, of the disjunction, the in-between is evident, for example in *Here and Elsewhere* (a film on the unbridgeable space between an ordinary family in France in the 70s and the Palestinian Revolution) or in *Passion* (a film on the relation between work and love). Many other Godard films can be understood as explorations of the different kinds of intervals between things, and this "method of the in-between," as Deleuze phrases it in *Cinema 2*,¹⁶ aims at making things visible anew.

In a crucial moment in the *Historie(s) du cinéma*, the voice-over says the following:

parce qu'oublié déjà
interdit encore
invisible toujours
tel était notre cinéma
et cela m'est resté
et Langlois nous le confirma
c'est le mot exact
que l'image
est d'abord de l'ordre de la rédemption
attention, celle du réel (Godard, 1998a,b, vol. 3, 148–149).¹⁷

This passage was undoubtedly written by Godard himself, contrary to most of the materials in this monumental work. The cinematographic image essentially has to do with redemption, not in the traditional religious sense, but in the sense of a method able to teach people to perceive the world. I do not have the time and space here to start a commentary on Godard's *Historie(s) du cinéma*, but as a provisional conclusion, I would like to suggest that Godard is a peculiar angel, like Gabriel in *Hail Mary*, with his "tough-guy approach," as David Sterritt rightly points out. His style is "full of naked flesh, vulgar language, fractured images, fragmented souls, and other shocks meant to jar us out of the lazy patterns and perceptions in which we've allowed ourselves to be trapped" (Sterritt, 200). But the god he works for is not separate from the world; it is nothing else than the presence of the world to us. His job is to wake us – if necessary with a well-intentioned brutality. Discussing and practicing through cinema the "redemption of the real," Godard seeks to remind us that we need to cultivate our intimacy with the world, since reality in the genuine sense means that which matters to us. And the real is lost if we, as sensible beings, lose our interest in the world and thus our ability to perceive.

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¹³ This quotation is from Merleau-Ponty's lecture on "Cinema and the New Psychology", first published in 1945 in the volume *Sens et non-sens* (English translation: Merleau-Ponty 1964b). A critical commented edition of the text has recently been published in the journal 1895. *Revue d'histoire du cinéma*, 70, 2013. Another text of Merleau-Ponty could be claimed by Godard, from a working note dated May 1960: "What I want to do is restore the world as a meaning of Being [...] as the vertical Being which none of the "representations" exhaust and which all reach, the wild Being (VI, 301/253).

¹⁴ Mauro Carbone explored this dialectical idea in his book *La visibilité de l'invisible. Merleau-Ponty entre Cézanne et Proust* (Carbone, 2001), but without taking the question of cinema into account.

¹⁵ Cf. above, footnote 4.

¹⁶ Cf. Deleuze (1989, 179–188).

¹⁷ "Because forgotten already /forbidden still/invisible always/such was our cinema/and that has stayed with me/and Langlois confirmed it for us/this word is right/the image is primarily of the order of redemption/beware, that of the real".

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